

Our Personal Journey as Presiders: Paths of Liturgy and Renewal

Presentation 1: My story and your story

What I'm going to do, and what I'm not going to do:

Reflection on liturgy and presiding in the light of my own experience as a pastor.
I'm not going to defend or criticize the RM3 or its English translation.
Nor am I going to get into theology or parish catechesis. (How well your people get prepared will be a direct function of your own interest and preparation.)
Nor am I going to tell you how to "say Mass," or "celebrate the eucharist," or even "preside at liturgy."

I'll probably touch on all these things incidentally. The new translation of the RM3 presents some unique challenges as well as opportunities, and I think it's important that we take them seriously.

I'm going to try to sidestep areas of controversy about the course of the liturgical renewal of the past almost fifty years, although I know I'm opinionated enough that I probably won't succeed perfectly in that. I am committed to fidelity to the faith, teaching and directives of the Church, although I firmly believe this needs a more nuanced and flexible approach than is usually given it.

I think I can best be of service more as a "tour guide" than a teacher. I'd like to see us look at the agenda of the next few days as a journey of exploration from the perspective of presiders at the Eucharist through a broad and diverse territory that includes history, theology, pastoral practice, communication, psychology, culture -- and so on -- as they relate to liturgy. Basically, I want to view liturgy not from the point of directives and guidelines, nor theology and doctrine, but to take seriously the "givens" of our celebration of liturgy -- words and actions, and what they say mean. This is to explore it from the inside out. "Lex orandi, lex credendi." To explore the "inner logic" of the liturgy, and let that be our guide when approaching the question of how we preside and lead our people in the celebration.

Tomorrow, I want to explore the wide range of sources and resources that can provide the field of our exploration, and can help us form ourselves as presiders. These will consist of principles and implications that I will mine from liturgical documents, theology, and other disciplines as well as personal experience. Not an exhaustive survey to be sure, but some items and perspectives that I have found important in developing my own understanding of what it means to preside at the eucharist. Implicit in this is an invitation for you to develop and deepen your own understanding as well.

Wednesday morning, I want to lead you on a step-by-step tour of the Mass, from the

perspective of the presider. This will not be a review of rubrics -- you can read those on your own. Rather, as we walk through the liturgy, I want to point out elements of special interest and concern to us as presiders.

Tomorrow and Wednesday afternoon, at 3:30, instead of a general session, there will be a practicum for those who may wish to rehearse together some of the texts of the Eucharistic Prayers. I think it's important for us to get a feel for these texts as prayers, and to discover how we can best proclaim the EP as a unified whole, one prayer from start to finish. There are so many things in the way we have done it at Mass that tend to fragment the prayer -- I'll talk about this tomorrow and Wednesday -- that I think we need to get a good "inner sense" of its unity to help people experience it as one prayer. If we can get a handle on the EP, I think that will be the key to our helping the members of our assemblies to get a handle on their participation. I've asked Monica Smith, a director and drama coach as well as an actor and singer and excellent cantor, to join me in this.

Tonight I want to begin by sharing with you a journey through my own life. I think I have had a great many diverse experiences that have been significant in bringing me to where I am today. The same is true for you. I'd like to suggest that, while I am recounting some of the really formative people and events in my life, that you think about your own life, and the people and event that have shaped who you are today as a priest in a pastoral relationship with God's people. Late in life, I have come to value that contribution that every event has made in forming who I am today, and what I can be for others. As I'm telling this story, I hope it will find an echo or a counterpoint with your own story.

I was here at St. John's Seminary during the heady Vatican II days. Ecclesiology with Pat Thompson. MC, staying up late at night with the new provisional ritual books that were being published in those early days after 1965, repeatedly revising the notes, some of them really ancient, for our seminary ceremonies. My first encounter with liturgy "from the inside."

Ordained in 1968; one of Archbishop Manning's first acts in 1970 was to establish the senate of priests, and I was on the Liturgy subcommittee (Don Kribs & Joe Sartoris, Paul Menke -- others I don't remember). I think our main achievement over several years was to recommend and lay out a plan for an archdiocesan liturgical commission. The subcommittee also recommended that the Archdiocese send a priest for further studies in liturgy, and I was chosen to go to Rome in 1972. Interesting sign of those times here: I was only allowed one year of a two-year program, but was sent back in 1975 to finish the second year. (I'm not sure if there were questions as to whether the program was "safe," or perhaps whether I was "safe" -- maybe both.)

Rome was not my first choice, but I think it turned out to be providential. Not that they had the best liturgy program, but it put me in almost day-to-day contact with the great architects of the renewed liturgy: Salvatore Marsili, Cipriano Vaggagini, Burkhardt Neunheuser, Adrian Nocent, Hermann Schmidt, and many others. It was the perfect place again for an "insider's view." to get a feel for the inner workings of liturgy. Rome was also an international place, where one

could come in contact with other young priests like me from all over the world -- a budding multicultural awareness.

Liturgical Commission. Full-time parish assignments, but I did a lot of work for the Archdiocese apart from the parish: Perm diaconate, lay mission helpers, parish workshops, seminary one day a week, 1-semester liturgy intro for 3 years, articles in the Tidings. Never full time. Came close to being Liturgy Office Director, but it did not pan out. By hindsight, I'm grateful. Providence took me in a very different direction: after a growth-filled three years as associate with Jerry Schmit in the wonderful African-American community of Holy Name of Jesus, I found myself in campus ministry -- 5 years (83-88) at CSULB, and 6 years (88-2004) as archdiocesan director. Here I learned above all the art and importance of partnership and collaboration in a ministering community made up of ordained and lay and religious men and women, colleagues respecting each other's roles and affirming each other's gifts. A lesson I continue to treasure -- and I hope, live -- today. That time also found me back in school, at Pepperdine pursuing doctoral studies in Institutional Management. (ABD) In this I came to learn and understand such things as systems thinking (how parts of an organization relate to the whole), leadership styles, paradigm shifts (really important to understand what's happened in the Church throughout history and today), change management (how to effectively be a change agent), and strategic planning.

All this really helped me understand that when I became a pastor for the first time (OLA Claremont following Bill Barry), and all hell broke loose pretty quickly, that instability is normal in a time of transition, and that the best way to deal with it is not to impose my will and make sure everything goes my way nor to ignore it and hope the problems will solve themselves. I think I would describe my approach as one of patient attentiveness, keeping alert for the opportunities to make pointed strategic changes (often unnoticed by those clamoring for results) that lay foundations for organic (not revolutionary) growth, and often emphasizing relationships and reconciliation among factions over and above immediate results. Oh, and seeing mistakes as learning opportunities too. I had plenty of those in my fifteen years at OLA.

Sweetser brought a method and a structure to the way a parish can be effectively led and managed. I believe the PAR process was the most significant thing to happen at OLA, and I'm so grateful to see that the structured relationships within a dynamic community of leaders are still the backbone and life's blood of parish life there. We are taking the baby steps toward the same process at GS. One of the very helpful and practical insights that I've gotten from Fr. Sweetser is the importance of seeking -- and committing oneself to -- partnerships in ministry. I'd like to explore that in more depth tomorrow evening.

Another very recent love: Pilgrimage, and its implications. Fell in love with Turkey, the land and its people, and became convinced that it holds a wealth of enrichment for our understanding of our heritage and Christianity and our world today. My favorite definition of Pilgrimage is a "journey to a far place in order to live more fully in our "near" place. Pilgrimage idea is to touch the sacred in many facets, broaden our understanding and let God touch us in new ways, so that we return transformed. That's what the liturgy does too. If Pilgrimage, like a retreat,

is a “high point,” a mountaintop experience, in our journey through the valley of life, so the Eucharist is a high point, a place where we touch eternity, in our here and now journey of faith, hope and love.

That’s my story. I hope as I was bringing you along, you were thinking about the journey of your own life, and how it has brought you to this point in your relationship to God and his people in Christ, as a priest, a fellow servant in the Lord’s vineyard. Please ask yourself, what in your own past experience contributes to your ministry today? And how does it do so?

So with that . . . here we are. I look forward to sharing some insights with you in the coming days. I hope you do to.